

# Employee Spotlight: Ronnie Bell

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## Soulful vocals for modern times

From inspirational gospel to traditional rhythm and blues to his own distinct and seductive sound, Ronnie “Mr. Cotton Candy” Bell of the Nuclear Process Infrastructure Group (NPI-2) takes personal joy in creating music that touches as many people as possible. After singing backup with the gospel group George Perkins and the Voices of Harmony, Ronnie began to explore his own musical style, subsequently releasing several extended-play CDs, as well as singles such as “I’ll Change” and “Cotton Candy.”

## Surrounded by music

Ronnie spent his formative days in the small town of Walker, Louisiana, just 15 miles east of Baton Rouge. From an early age he sang in his church choir at Gloryland

Church of God in Christ. But not everything was music in Ronnie's early years. He and his family suffered tragedy when his six-year-old sister died. Only eight years old at the time, Ronnie says, he began to act out so much that he was soon labeled a "problem child" at school and he was later expelled from both seventh and eighth grades.

Standing at a crossroads, Ronnie turned his attention back to music. "I didn't have a choice," he laughs. "I mean, my mom, uncles, and grandmother, they all sang at church. Singing was what I was going to do—it was part of my family and part of the culture in which I grew up." He sang with several gospel choirs, eventually earning the right to solo.

"The first time I sang solo, I was just 10 years old. Up there, in front of so many people, I sang the whole time with my eyes closed," Ronnie recalls. "When I finally opened my eyes, everybody was standing up—at that point, I knew this was what I was meant to do."

## **Jamming with the band**

After performing with his great-uncle George Perkins, himself a successful soul singer, Ronnie joined Kenneth Mitchell and the Voices of Praise. Complementing Ronnie's passion for singing was an interest in sports, which led to a football scholarship at Delta State University in Cleveland, where he played on a Division II National Championship team. But two years into college, Ronnie realized that football was not his calling.

"It came to me that I did not really plan on making it into the NFL," Ronnie explains. "So I asked myself, 'What am I doing here?' The coach then put me in a situation where I had to make a choice." Ronnie's choice was to transfer to Southern University and join the world-renowned Southern University Concert Choir. There he earned the distinction of performing as a guest soloist with the Southern University Marching Band. He also performed at the Bayou Classic Battle of the Bands in the New Orleans Superdome in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2011.

## **Tapping into a new vibe**

In 2009, Ronnie earned his bachelor's degree in supply-chain management. In 2013, he earned his MBA at Southern University. That same year, he released his debut self-titled EP. Two years later, he released an R&B/hip-hop mix-tape titled *In My Feelings*, which he followed up in 2015 with the EP *#Bbmyself (Bad by Myself)*. These two releases demonstrated Ronnie's diversity, as he mixed hip-hop, blues, and Southern-driven soul.

While performing at different events, Ronnie would occasionally bump into his friend Kim Hill, who goes by "Frost" and would eventually work with him as his manager. It was Frost who encouraged Ronnie to record a new song, "Cotton Candy."

## **"The love of my life"**

"The song was a mix of blues, Southern-soul, and swing out," Ronnie says, "so it was different than traditional R&B or pop. One of my friends—he really hated this song. My

opinion, however, was that I could make it work. I knew that Frost had a beat on this type of music, and that it was one people enjoyed. The fact that I didn't like it, and my friend didn't like it, made me want to breathe life into it. Of course, 'Cotton Candy' has turned out to be the biggest song I have recorded so far."

Although he prides himself on his genre flexibility, Ronnie remains at heart an R&B artist. "R&B is not just something I do. It's me—I live it, breathe it, and make it my all with every song I write and perform. It is indeed fair to say that this is the love of my life."

*Ronnie Bell recently became a full-time staff member for NPI-2, the Nuclear Process Infrastructure Group. He works on the Solumina Team in Scheduling, Planning & Shop Floor Control.*

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## Resources

- Explore Ronnie's music at his personal [website](#).
  - Photo's featured at [Ronnie's Gallery](#).
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**(505) 667-7000**

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